the guide ...to technology

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TECH-INDUCED TRANQUILITY

The right 21st-century tools can help you channel your energy.

BY KEVIN SAVETZ

Technology is supposed to make our lives easier, but don't you sometimes wish it would get with the program and, well, *make your life easier?* Bountiful junk e-mail, demanding mobile phones, and overburdened schedule-keepers seem to conspire to complicate our lives. Here's a roundup of technologies that really can lend a digital helping hand.

Start with your e-mail inbox: If junk mail is rampant, a better spam filter can separate the mail you want from the mail you don't. For the Mac, you can't do better than SpamSieve ($30, c-command.com/spamsieve). For Windows, MailWasher Pro ($37, mailwasher.com) fights the good fight against those obnoxious commercial e-mail messages. Your e-mail program may already have a spam filter built in, but these tools are more meticulous mail sorters.

The mobile phone is a miracle of our time, but some days it might seem more of a curse (and that might depend on who's calling). While new cell phones are loaded with an incredible array of features, a free service called GrandCentral (GrandCentral.com) can make the phone you already have more useful. GrandCentral provides you with a phone number, and lets you control what happens when people call it. The number can ring all of your phones at once (home and mobile, for example) so callers don't have to find you. You can screen incoming calls before accepting them, or choose to have peskier acquaintances go directly to voicemail without disrupting you. Checking your messages won't be such a chore, either; GrandCentral will deliver them to your e-mail inbox as audio files.

Here's another phone tool, this one from Google: Call 800-GOOG-411 for free directory assistance instead of paying your provider's inflated 411 fees.

Struggling to keep your family organ-

PHOTO: MEIKO ARQUILLOS

ized and in touch? Cozi (www.cozi.com) can be the tech solution. The free service includes a calendar that can be shared among everyone in the house—when one person adds something to his calendar, everyone in the house can know about it. When you're away from the computer, the service will send you schedule reminders via a phone call or text message. Although geared to families, teachers can use Cozi for team teaching and other collaborative work.

Finally, when you hunker down on the couch to watch some TV or a movie at the end of the day, technology can make relaxation time better, too. If you haven't tried a digital video recorder such as TiVo, you are missing out: The device lets you pause live TV, or better yet, you can skip right over the commercials. (Boxes start at $99, plus activation fee: www.tivo.com) TiVo can also make trips to the video store a thing of the past: The new Amazon Unbox service lets you rent or buy movies using your remote control. It's just like watching movies in a hotel room, without the overpriced mini-bar.

At the end of the day, technology can make relaxation time better, too.

It's New! NEA Click & Save

Deals and discounts for NEA members at hundreds of local and national retailers, including leading technology and electronics providers such as Circuit City, Dell, Panasonic, Toshiba, ViewSonic and Sharper Image. You can create a customized shopping profile to receive e-alerts on only the types of products you want. Get your holiday shopping started at www.neamb.com/clickandsave.

Go Green in Time for the Holidays

Support Sustainability

Americans spent roughly $4.5 billion during the 2006 holiday shopping season. Imagine if that money all went to green businesses—those committed to environmental sustainability, sweatshop-free labor, fair trade, and cruelty-free products. Using Co-op America's *National Green Pages*™ (www.coopamerica.org), you'll find nearly 3,000 businesses that fit the bill and offer everything from recycled glass goblets to chocolate treats that are not the product of child labor.

Gifts We Could All Use

Longing to replace frenzied mall runs with peaceful family time this holiday season? You're not alone. The Center for a New American Dream—a group that helps Americans consume responsibly—says their national surveys consistently show most Americans "feel put upon by the commercialization of the season and want more of what matters...not just more stuff." Among the host of resources on the center's site is a downloadable template for Gift of Time Cards, which pledge the giver to spend time, not necessarily money, on loved ones. www.newdream.org/holiday/

Eco-friendly, Year Round

It's been dubbed "The Green CNN." TreeHugger.com is a media outlet with a global network of writers offering newsletters, videos, and radio shows for green news, solutions, and product information. Want to find out how other treehuggers keep their holiday season merry and bright? Get gift ideas for the environmental activist and the eco-challenged alike in treehugger's annual gift guide. And don't miss their year-round feature "How to Green Your Gifts." www.treehugger.com

PHOTO: ANDRESR

HOW I... Chose My New Computer

When it came time to invest in a new computer, Marsha Chevalier, who teaches grades 1-8 in Santa Rosa, California, and travels a lot, knew she wanted a laptop. Her other requirements were: compatibility with computers at her school; a big, clear display; lots of memory; and a solid guarantee. Chevalier turned to several sources for advice, including salespeople, a computer-savvy friend, and Web sites. "I checked online first for pricing, features, and specials," she said. Next she test drove all the laptops she could and grilled the sales floor folks about the differences between models. In the end, Marsha chose the Apple MacBook Pro laptop, and is "more than delighted" with the computer and the software that came loaded on it.

200B
200 BILLION COMPACT DISCS HAVE BEEN SOLD SINCE THE FIRST CD—ABBA'S The Visitors—ROLLED OFF THE PRESS 25 YEARS AGO. TODAY, SALES OF CDS ARE DECLINING, IN PART BECAUSE OF THE POPULARITY COMPETITION FROM ONLINE MUSIC SERVICES.
(SOURCE: WWW.TGDAILY.COM/CONTENT/VIEW/33437/113)

Comparing Online Photo Services

Online photofinishers' prints rival or exceed the quality from your local drugstore. Once you've uploaded your pics, these online services let you get creative. Here's a breakdown on what the leading sites have to offer.

*per 4x6 print	KODAK EASYSHARE	WEBSHOTS	EZ PRINTS	SNAPFISH	SHUTTERFLY
Price*	$.15	$.15	$0.19	$.12	$.12 – .15
URL	Kodakgallery.com	Webshots.com	ezprints.com	Snapfish.com	Shutterfly.com
Special features	35mm and Advantix processing is available, using pre-paid mailers.	Spend way too much time viewing and rating other users' best shots.	The site may be sparse, but it's easy to use.	Send pictures from your cell phone to an online album.	You can have prints shipped to you or pick them up at your local Target store.
Online sharing	Unique Photo Voice feature lets you narrate to friends as you share photos online.	Primarily a photo sharing community, Webshots sharing features outdo other sites.	Picture sharing is only available in the "classic" version of the site.	You can share pictures with friends, but they will need to sign up for a (free) account.	Share your pictures with password protection or choose to let anyone see them.
Fancy, fun picture products	"Collage prints" let you put oodles of pictures on one page, up to a 20"x30" poster size.	"Canvas prints" put your picture on mounted canvas, like a painting.	Picture jigsaw puzzles and calendars are among the items you can order.	Order mugs, greeting cards, and other products emblazoned with your best pics.	Custom framing service delivers framed and matted pictures.
Our panel says:	You can share photos with friends, family, and colleagues without flooding their inbox...they can just click on a link. —John Allman, counselor, Virginia	This site offers the most sharing choices. You can publish pics to your own site or blog. You can view professional photographers' work, and the staff blog is a fun read. —Staff tester	Creating personalized greeting cards is less expensive on ezprints than on some of the other sites. —Staff tester	Uploading is push-button simple, although re-arranging photos is still a little clunky. —Staff tester	My friends and family love the convenience of ordering their own prints from my "shared pictures" online. —Kristi Carpenter, 7th grade teacher, Iowa

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